

Keystone to Success: Accountability

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Introduction

As the leader of your organization, you recognize that there are many factors to success. A great product, competent employees, and strategic vision, for example, are all part of your big picture. But there's another, less tangible element that's critical, whether you're trying to enhance your company culture or hit double-digit growth numbers: accountability.

The dictionary defines it as "accepting responsibility for one's actions," which to my ear connotes a willingness to "fess up to mistakes". That may be part of it. In Pacific Crest Group's experience, however, real accountability means that you, your management, and your staff approach work with a sense of ownership. You make decisions every day with a consciousness and conscientiousness far broader than the moment at hand. This results in better decisions. Work quality is exemplary. Employees thrive together. Customers are happier. And your collective effort is greater than the sum of individual contributions.

The big question, then, is how do you increase accountability within your organization? There is no simple solution—it's a process that takes time, strength, and finesse. The good news is that our three-step approach, outlined below, provides a framework to move in the right direction.

Step 1: Establish Clear Goals

From the highest corporate level all the way to individual contributors, you need clearly stated, well-aligned goals and a consistent review process to monitor progress. Accountability requires reference points: what you promised to accomplish and when. Without goals, you won't have anything to hold your team accountable to, and people may work without focus or at cross-purposes. By putting stakes in the ground, you enable accountability to exist. You create an environment in which meaningful ownership behavior can flourish.

Step 2: Cultivate Dedication

When you have big dreams for your business, it takes more than an average effort to achieve them. Hard work and long hours are the most obvious forms of dedication, but they'll only get you so far; what you really need is creative problem solving, anticipation of new opportunities, a willingness to take risks, and a commitment to succeed even when faced with incredible challenges. But how do you motivate employees to dedicate themselves beyond their job fundamentals?

We advocate an approach to employee development that goes far beyond the basic annual performance review and holiday bonus. Consistent, regular communication between manager and associate is key to ensuring that everyone is on the same page about goals and results. Bonuses tied to individual and company performance are critical, too.

Make sure that your team has the resources it needs to accomplish its goals, from time to tools. You can cultivate dedication further by rewarding ownership behavior—not every time, and not simply with money. Public recognition, a day off, or a new leadership opportunity are all means of messaging to your group that you value their dedication to reaching your goals.

Step 3: Commit Yourself

Documenting goals for your team and creating an environment conducive to dedication is just the foundation. Sustainable accountability requires the business owner's long-term commitment—to measure performance, provide consistent feedback, and reward desired behavior. Over time, some of these elements will become ingrained in your company culture and require less effort. Until then, you'll need to stick to the new structure proactively. Holding yourself accountable to it will be the perfect example for your team to follow. Some people in your organization may not accept your greater emphasis on accountability, and they'll leave. While turnover is never easy, it ultimately will help you to promote a culture in which ownership behavior from everyone is more the norm.



Franka Winchester is co-founder of Pacific Crest Group, where she leads the Accounting and Employee Development departments. Before forming Pacific Crest Group, Franka held financial and human resources leadership roles at several start-up companies, including Colo.com and Softbank, Inc. She is currently volunteering as the Finance Chair for the Board of the San Francisco Chapter of Entrepreneurs' Organization, and is the President of Dakota Partners Inc. Franka earned a B.S. from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and is an AORN Certified Ambulatory Surgery Administrator.

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